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Preparatory Committee for the Special Session of the General Assembly in 2001 for Follow-up to the World Summit for Children
First substantive session
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Item 4 of the provisional agenda*
Introduction of the report of the Secretary-General

Debate on the document entitled "Emerging issues for children in the twenty-first century" (A/AC.256/3-E/ICEF/2000/13) held at the annual session of the Executive Board of UNICEF

New York, 22-26 May 2000

President's summary

1. On 24 May 2000, at the annual session, the UNICEF Executive Board discussed the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Emerging issues for children in the twenty-first century" (A/AC.256/3-E/ICEF/2000/13), with a view to offering its input to the first substantive session of the Preparatory Committee for the Special Session of the General Assembly in 2001 for Follow-up to the World Summit for Children.

2. The Board concluded that, overall, the document provides a very good background for the deliberations of the Preparatory Committee. The analysis of progress since 1990, the identification of challenges for the future, and key opportunities to improve the situation of children capture the essence of issues that should be considered by the Preparatory Committee.

3. The document's conceptual framework, including the life-cycle approach to the rights and well-being of children and adolescents, is a useful way of approaching future action for children. The three key outcome areas for children — that all children should have a good start to life, that they should have an opportunity to complete a good-quality education, and that adolescents have opportunities fully to

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develop their individual capacities — reflect issues of fundamental importance. However, further work should be undertaken to identify specific practical and measurable actions in these three areas. One way of sharpening the analysis and defining concrete actions might be to set up thematic working groups with experts in the various fields, to discuss the different aspects of a new agenda, and to submit these recommendations to the Preparatory Committee.

4. Governments, relevant United Nations agencies, Bretton Woods institutions and civil society organizations should be actively involved in identifying the most effective ways to achieve sustainable social outcomes for children.

5. Poverty is the most fundamental obstacle to the well-being of children. Therefore, the vision of breaking the cycle of poverty in one generation deserves strong endorsement. Universal access to basic social services must be considered a key component of the fight against poverty.

6. The unfinished agenda of the last decade must be vigorously pursued to achieve the goals of the World Summit for Children. Goals adopted at the World Summit need to be updated, and achievements that have already been made must be sustained. Without vigilance and determined efforts, there may be setbacks to the progress achieved since 1990. Committed leadership at all levels, particularly at the highest level, is an essential requirement if children's rights are to be fully realized.

7. In the light of the near universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a rights-based approach should underpin all future action for children. The time has come to make a commitment to breaking the cycle of violations of children's rights in one generation. To ensure this, appropriate legal policy and institutional mechanisms such as the system of "ombudspersons" for safeguarding the rights of children, should be instituted in all countries.

8. The challenge of globalization — how it has affected the ability of countries to achieve the goals of the World Summit for Children, and how it can be harnessed to accelerate progress for children — deserves a more in-depth analysis and recommendations for action. For example, the revolution in information and communication technology has both positive and negative implications for children. Its potential for good must be harnessed to reach hard-to-reach families and communities, to empower them to uplift their condition, and to prevent marginalization.

9. More resources are needed and the resources available must be better utilized to fight poverty and to provide access to basic services for all. The upturn in 1998 in official development assistance must be sustained and accelerated to reach the agreed United Nations target. Other measures, such as a significant reduction in external debt and the need to focus aid flows on the neediest countries and the neediest people, as well as on countries in transition suffering economic crises, must be part of the international action in favour of children.

10. At the national level, countries should allocate a higher proportion of their national budgets to basic social services — guided by the 20/20 compact. Greater efforts should be made to reduce military expenditures in favour of child development programmes.

11. There is a need for child protection issues to be given greater attention in the future. Special efforts are needed to protect the rights of children affected by drug

abuse; children, especially girls, affected by sexual and emotional abuse; children with disabilities; children who are traumatized, displaced or are refugees; and child labourers and child prisoners — within the overall objective of prevention. The issue of child soldiers has emerged as a major concern not just in terms of their protection but as an impediment to child development, and merits special attention.

12. Along with access and coverage, quality of basic services merits greater attention. While Governments have the primary responsibility for assuring basic social services for children, increased collaboration of the private sector must be secured as part of corporate social responsibility. Partnership with non-governmental organizations and civil society must be enhanced.

13. Education, with an emphasis on gender equity, quality and achievement, is the key to future human development. Access to basic health services, safe sanitation and proper nutrition must remain priorities.

14. The challenge of HIV/AIDS must be confronted in a proactive manner, recognizing that its havoc is already destroying many nations and is lurking as a great threat to all nations.

15. The new emphasis on participation of children at all stages of their life cycle, in accordance with their evolving capacity, needs to be nurtured and promoted. The issue of exclusion and equal rights for all marginalized groups who suffer discrimination also needs to be stressed.

16. The campaign for universal birth registration addresses the fundamental rights of children to a name and a nationality.

17. The future agenda for children to be adopted at the special session of the General Assembly on the end-decade review of the achievements of the goals of the World Summit for Children must have universal relevance, addressing the situation of children in industrialized and developing countries. It must emphasize the development of the whole child and the universality of child rights, while changing the pattern of social investments. Investments in the life cycle of children can change the course of human development by seizing the right opportunities at the right moment.